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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/23/2029
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [MA](#) [MP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: PERIODIC SECURITY UPDATE JUNE 19

REF: ANTAN 435

Classified By: RSO R.J. BENT FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Unfounded rumors and press reports of mercenaries hired by Ravalomanana (Ra8) arriving in country continue, as have inaccurate press reports of alleged U.S. support for the Legalists. However, the Department's June 17 press statement usefully corrected the record and played in some of the press here as the U.S. finally "deserting" Ravalomanana. A small explosive device detonated at a French-owned grocery store on June 16; no injuries were reported. In the approach toward National Day on June 26, the HAT transitional government announced the roll-out of a new security plan, Vigimada. Peaceful Legalist rallies continue on a daily basis. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) MORE RUMORS OF MERCENARIES: The subject of recent rumors, based on inaccurate press reports and fueled by deliberate partisan manipulation of public opinion, is the arrival of mercenaries funded by Ravalomanana with the intent of retaking control of the country - a plan that is not feasible. (See Reftel for more detail.) The international airport at Tana/Ivato is now slightly more heavily guarded. All flight manifests are being screened more carefully than usual before entry. As a cultural point, nationalist Malagasy citizens would react poorly to mercenaries on their soil, as evidenced by the uproar and media frenzy in February/March over equally groundless reports of "mercenaries" (who turned out to be foreign security advisors providing -- very indiscreetly -- after-sales-service on tear gas and other riot-control equipment received at that time). Operationally and financially, it would take a significant effort to take over Madagascar, the 4th largest island in the world. And being an island, there is also the nature nautical fortress to overcome. Nonetheless, all these logical factors do not prevent large sectors of the Malagasy population from believing these mercenaries' arrival is imminent.

¶3. (C) EXPLOSION AT A GROCERY STORE: On June 16, a small explosive device detonated in a French-owned grocery store, Leader Price, causing damage but harming no one. This occurred at a remote branch of the grocery chain that is not regularly frequented by Americans or the mission community. The blast led to local speculation that it might have been an attack against French-linked targets by frustrated Ravalomanana supporters, and that it might portend more such acts. Others speculated that it was perpetrated by pro-HAT forces seeking to pin the blame on the pro-Ravalomanana side. In the event, no further such events have occurred, and the police have yet to determine who was responsible. Even if suspects are named, given the opaque political and legal system here, it will be unclear whether they were the true perpetrators. RSO inside sources attribute the incident to a vendetta against the chain owners, as they have been previously targeted and fled the country soon after that attack.

¶4. (U) VIGIMADA: Within a few hours after the above mentioned bombing, the HAT government announced the creation of the, "Vigimada" (similar to the French Vigipirate security plan) to quell rumors of foreign mercenaries and ensure safety and security as the Malagasy Independence day approaches (June 26). Since it is a military plan, precise details have not been announced, but there are mentions of deployed armored vehicles in the provinces.

¶5. (C) PEACEFUL RALLIES CONTINUE ON A DAILY BASIS: On June 10, it was announced at the daily Legalist/Ra8 rally that protesters were to carry U.S. flags with them the following day to symbolize "U.S. support of the legalist movement." On June 11, for the first time, the Legalist crowd peacefully left their usual location (Magro) and marched peacefully to Democracy Square, carrying some U.S. flags and wearing some red, white and blue clothing. At the Square, the stage was set with two U.S. flags as part of the backdrop. These practices lasted only one day, but there are lingering press reports referring to this alleged American support. In the same vein, "La Verite" also reported that Ra8 had hired an SOC LLC, a Nevada-based security company that has contracts with the Department of State. In off-the-record contacts and through other channels, post has made it known -- including to Ravalomanana himself, but also to the HAT -- that such reports are inaccurate and that all claims of U.S. support should stop. On June 17, the Department helpfully issued a press statement (widely covered in the local press) re-asserting US impartiality and rejecting all use of force to resolve the crisis here. This statement appears to have driven a stake through the heart of any remaining claims that the U.S. supports any one side in this crisis.
MARQUARDT